



State of Louisiana

Department of Environmental Quality



M.J. "Mike" Foster
Governor

Contact Jim Friloux for more information: (225) 765-0735; e-mail: jim_f@deq.state.la.us

J. Dale Givens
Secretary

February 15, 2002

TO: Editor-In-Chief
The Times
(318) 459-3301

FROM: Jim Friloux
Interim Communications Director

RE: Op-Ed response to Reliant Energy issue

WE REQUEST THAT YOU INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT IN YOUR UPCOMING PUBLISHINGS. THIS REPRESENTS THE DEQ'S OFFICIAL POSITION IN THIS MATTER.

"Keeping the balance between industry and the environment is a difficult job, one that requires making difficult decisions. As Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality, I've never been one to shy away from criticism, discussion or attacks. Disagreement builds character, examination builds integrity, and change builds resolve. It is a resolve to do things right, to do things better and to do it with professionalism. Journalists also have the responsibility of keeping the balance – telling every side to a story.

Recent events have brought the quality of our state's drinking water to the forefront. A lawsuit filed by 600 plaintiffs against the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) alleges that DEQ participated in a scheme to defraud two of the plaintiffs by withholding from them information about the contamination of their water wells and or property as they sold out to Reliant Energy.

Recent news reports fueled by trial lawyers and 600 plaintiffs—some of whom live well outside of the Reliant site and Haughton-- have turned fact into fiction. It's time to set the record straight. DEQ's record is backed with scientific evidence, documentation and the truth.

DEQ's involvement with the site started in 1985 in response to a citizen's complaint. We promptly investigated this complaint and found petroleum contamination in that citizen's drinking water well. We advised the citizen of the contamination and prevailed upon the site operator to provide her with safe drinking water. The water wells of other nearby citizens were also sampled and their water was determined to be clean.

We directed the owner of the gas processing plant-- ARKLA —to install several monitoring wells. Today, 40 monitoring wells and a state-of-the-art recovery system ensure the safety of the water supply and that of the residents.

The trial lawyers and the media would have you believe that DEQ never told the other two neighbors in the area that there was contamination. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, DEQ personnel got to know these neighbors over the years because they repeatedly checked the safety of the resident's water and had discussions with them about contamination found in a nearby monitoring well.

DEQ was very forthcoming about the contamination –going so far as meeting with these residents several times. We consider meeting face to face with people and speaking with them on the telephone, the best type of notification.

People deserve clean and pure drinking water. We believe we were protecting these two neighbors by having their water tested half a dozen times prior to them selling their property and several more times after the sales. The water tested clean each and every time.

Today we are continuing to direct the clean up of this site which has resulted in the removal of approximately 300-thousand gallons of petroleum product.

The facts in this case have been misrepresented. The documents—supported by scientific evidence in some instances—tell a different story. When you apply the governor's executive order to this case, DEQ did everything it was supposed to.

We notified the people of contamination in the vicinity. We tested their water, shared the results with them and kept a close eye on the flow of the contamination. We made sure proper measures were put into place to clean up the environment, and we are still involved to this day.

We have not abandoned the cleanup nor have we abandoned the people.”

J. Dale Givens
Secretary,
Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality
